UNITED
NATIONS

CRC

Convention on the
Rights of the Child

Distr.
GENERAL

CRC/C/SR.515
16 April 1999

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Twentieth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 515th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 19 January 1999, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Miss MASON

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CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (continued)

Initial report of Guinea

This record is subject to correction.

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GE.99-40189 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Guinea [CRC/C/3/Add.48; HRI/CORE/1/Add.80; CRC/C/Q/GUI/1; written replies of the Government of Guinea to the questions raised in the list of issues (document without reference number distributed in the meeting room, in French only)]

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Daraba, Mr. Keita, Mr. Doré, Mr. Camara and Ms. Diaby (Guinea) took places at the Committee table.

2. The CHAIRPERSON welcomed the Guinean delegation and invited it to present the initial report of Guinea (CRC/C/3/Add.48).

3. Ms. DARABA (Guinea) pointed out that her country shared borders with six other West African countries, five of which were at war. Guinea had been the fourteenth country to ratify the Convention, as early as 10 April 1990, without formulating any reservation. In ratifying the Convention, the Guinean Government had been well aware of the commitment it was making in the eyes of the international community, all the more so since children accounted for 45 per cent of the country's population. The Guinean authorities had therefore pondered the measures to be taken to implement the Convention, with respect for both the country's culture and international legislation. A Secretariat of State had been established in February 1992, originally attached to the then Ministry for Children's and Social Affairs. That Secretariat had become the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Promotion of Women and Children in August 1996 and had promptly proceeded to evolve a national child promotion and protection policy centred around two major themes: inclusion of pre-school education as a fundamental component of basic education for all - with the adoption of several orders and decrees - and protection of children living in difficult circumstances. The civil war then raging in Liberia had brought half a million refugees to Guinea, 70 per cent of them women and children. The national child policy formulated in December 1996 had developed into the preparation of a plan of action and then a framework programme for child protection. The authorities, eager to reverse the trend established by the previous socialist regime, under which all initiatives had originated almost exclusively with the State, had ensured that NGOs, trade unions, political parties and the liberal professions were involved in the process. In addition to those structural measures, the Guinean Committee to Monitor the Protection of the Rights of Children had also been strengthened. It was a consultative organ in the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Promotion of Women and Children, with not only a national headquarters, but branches at the prefecture and sub-prefecture levels. The Guinean Monitoring Committee had been allocated resources - albeit too meagre - which gave it a degree of operational autonomy. A national population and human-resource commission involving a number of ministries had also been created and had helped build rehabilitation centres for children in conflict with the law. Another legislative measure that gave effect to the Convention was the creation of children's tribunals with specially trained personnel.

4. The Ministry of Social Affairs, the Promotion of Women and Children, which she herself directed, had, since June 1998, been assigned a substantial share of the State budget and enjoyed the privileged status of priority ministry with regard to budget allocations.

5. Alongside all those institutional and structural measures, the authorities had undertaken to disseminate the Convention on the ground through groups with a large following, such as the coordinating office of the country's women's associations which, since 1994, had organized a dozen seminars on the Convention in urban and rural areas alike. Teachers, the police, special police ("gendarmes") and drivers, who came into direct contact with the public, had also been trained in the principles of the Convention. Guinea had three official alphabets that would be used for transcribing the Convention into the eight national languages. However, the task had not been completed owing to difficulties in harmonizing the different language concepts.

6. Special protection measures for children had also been elaborated under the social action policy for street children, refugees, the disabled and children in conflict with the law, among others. In addition, a new Code of Individuals and the Family was currently before the National Assembly. A new text had been required because the preceding Code lent itself to divergent interpretations of children's rights, making it a source of potential violations of those rights.

7. Since the ratification of the Convention, the Guinean authorities had, in spite of all, been faced with a number of difficulties occasioned particularly by its inadequate material and financial resources, the dearth of qualified personnel - particularly social workers - and the fact that the functions of the National Directorate for the Promotion of Children had long been shared out among several ministries. It should be remembered that Guinea was one of the 10 poorest countries in the world. Its human development index was very low and 40 per cent of the population lived below the absolute poverty threshold. However, despite its poor economic situation, the authorities had in the past five years made great strides in the field of health and 90 per cent of children were now inoculated against diphtheria, tetanus and poliomyelitis. The school enrolment rate had also risen from 28 per cent to 51 per cent in 10 years. Lastly, despite the structural adjustment policies imposed on the country, food security was on its way to becoming a reality.

8. Lastly, by June 1999 the entire text of the Convention would most likely have been translated into the national languages and published in the form of a brochure. A school for blind young people was also due to begin operation during the current year, as well as three centres for handicapped children, including refugees from Sierra Leone. A programme of supervision of young children by elderly and retired persons, the spirit of which was totally in conformity with the country's culture, had also recently seen the light of day.

9. The CHAIRPERSON asked Ms. Daraba to make a brief oral presentation of the replies provided by Guinea to the questions raised in the list of issues, because they had not been translated into English owing to their late arrival.

10. Ms. DARABA, replying to question 1, said that, in order to give effect to the provisions of the Convention, the Government had already prepared a set of juridical and statutory measures, including a new Civil Code, a new Code of Penal Procedure, a Labour Code, a Social Security Code and, especially, a Code of Individuals and the Family. Whereas the former Civil Code contained 14 articles governing adoption, the new Code of Individuals and the Family contained 23, which governed national and international adoption follow-up mechanisms. An effort was being made to collect all those Codes together in a single text. Replying to question 2, she said that responsibility for coordination between the central and local bodies for the activities of the Committee to Monitor the Protection of the Rights of Children lay with the National Directorate for Pre-School Education and Protection of Children. There were decentralized regional structures directed by regional inspectors for social affairs and promotion of women and children and, at the prefecture and commune level, by prefectoral and commune directors. The sub-prefectures had children's committees responsible for coordinating activities for children. The Guinean Committee to Monitor the Protection of the Rights of the Child was regularly consulted in all decision-making concerning children and, consistent with an approach adopted in 1996, the State confined itself to legislative and statutory activities and a coordinating role, while the programmes were essentially implemented by NGOs. The Guinean monitoring committee had a three-member executive office and five working commissions. The Committee's funds came from donations from Committee members or public and private institutions, State subsidies and the Committee's own fund-raising activities, the profits of which went directly to children.

11. Replying to question 3, she said that children under 15 years of age had accounted for 44.8 per cent of the population in 1990 and should reach 47.4 per cent by 2001. Also, the proportion of under-fives in 1990 had been 18.8 per cent and should stabilize around that figure by the year 2001. The number of deaths of children under five had been 67 per cent in 1990 and should fall to 57 per cent by the year 2001.

12. Turning to health indicators, she said that the infant mortality rate and the mortality rate among the under-fives were respectively 136 per thousand and 223 per thousand. Immunization coverage was 86 per cent for BCG, 73 per cent for DT/Pertussis and 56 per cent for the antitetanus vaccine. Of children under the age of five, 16 per cent suffered from diarrhoeal diseases. With regard to health coverage, 80 per cent of the population received preventive care and 40 to 45 per cent curative care. Chronic malnutrition and acute malnutrition affected 29.1 per cent and 12.1 per cent respectively of children under the age of five and 70 per cent of children from 8 to 14 years were hosts to intestinal parasites.

13. Where basic education indicators were concerned, it should be pointed out that the gross enrolment rate had been 51 per cent in 1995 (65 per cent for boys, 36.9 per cent for girls, 22 per cent in rural areas and 58 per cent in urban areas).

14. Replying to question 4, she said that State-allocated resources from the national development budget for the implementation of the Convention were on the increase. Since those resources were distributed among different

ministries (health, agriculture, education, justice and communication), the Government was endeavouring to strengthen coordination among the various ministries.

15. In reply to question 5, she pointed out that trade union and political pluralism, as well as separation of powers, had become a reality in Guinea. Moreover, the number of child-related NGOs was increasing; the Government had conducted a study in 1998 to determine to what extent it could increase its aid to them so as to make their work on the ground more effective.

16. In reply to question 6, she said that since 1990 the Government, in cooperation with UNICEF, had been carrying out training, sensitization and education activities for those involved in the implementation of the Convention, including the police, children's magistrates, prison administration staff, teachers and parliamentarians. Mention should also be made of the establishment of the Association of Mayors for Defence of the Rights of the Child. The Government also had plans to incorporate the provisions of the Convention in the primary-school civic education syllabus and to call on the media to disseminate the Convention to the public at large. In that regard, attention should be drawn to the special role played by the women NGOs coordination office.

17. Turning to unconventional modes of communication (question 7), she said that the Government, with financial support from UNFPA, was currently putting in place a national traditional communicators' network (religious authorities, "griots", traditional social organizations, etc.) for the popularization and enforcement of the Convention. That network, which was to become operational in the coming months, would be responsible for disseminating both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

18. Mrs. MOKHUANE inquired, first of all, what difficulties the Government had encountered in establishing detailed statistics and preparing indicators relating to children and, secondly, how the Convention was perceived by religious leaders, trainers, teachers, parents and all persons involved with children, since in most African societies children did not usually have a say.

19. Mr. KOLOSOV said he believed that approximately 80 per cent of Guineans were Muslims. He therefore wished to know whether the text of the Convention was available in Arabic, especially in remote regions. The Guinean delegation could perhaps also explain what obstacles, other than a shortage of financial resources, impeded implementation of the Convention and what measures the Government intended to take for more effective enforcement of national child legislation and for enhancing the action of the organs and ministries responsible for overseeing implementation of the Convention.

20. He also wished to know the concrete results achieved in the training of people involved with children since the report had been prepared one and a half years before, and the measures taken to overcome the difficulties encountered. It seemed to him that in Guinea June was the month of children rather than the month of children's rights. In that connection, he recalled that the General Assembly of the United Nations had recommended that States parties should proclaim 20 November each year as Children's Rights Day. He

also had the impression that the Guinean authorities had not fully realized that children were possessed of a number of rights set forth in the Convention, including the right to express their point of view. Lastly, he wished to know why the Guinean Government had not yet agreed to the amendment to the Convention to increase the membership of the Committee from 10 to 18.

21. Ms. MBOI congratulated the Guinean Government for presenting a rather comprehensive report and for having heeded the Committee's guidelines for the preparation of reports. However, since the report should have been presented in 1992, she wished to know whether the Government planned to take steps to submit its next report on time.

22. On the subject of indicators, she would like to know whether the Guinean Government possessed statistics on the exercise of the rights set forth in the Convention, whether it was making any attempt to break down the statistics in order to show the differences between town and country or the status of certain special categories of children and, lastly, whether there were any data on children between 15 and 18 years of age.

23. Concerning the dissemination of the Convention, the Guinean delegation had said that women's associations played an important role. However, she would say that while they made a very effective contribution to awareness within families, the range of their action did not extend to professional groups such as the police, the army or the magistracy. Furthermore, only women attended the meetings organized by those associations, whereas it was important for men to be involved in the defence of children's rights, particularly in order to prevent violence within the family. Lastly, she understood that NGOs played an increasingly important role in implementing the Convention. She therefore called for more details concerning collaboration between those NGOs and the Government, which was primarily responsible for such implementation.

24. Ms. PALME asked what measures the Government was taking to wage a more systematic battle against infant mortality, illiteracy and diseases such as malaria and to implement the rights of the child "to the maximum extent of its available resources". It was by assigning priority to education and health that the country would ensure its future development. Lastly, she asked what measures - including legislative measures - the Government intended to take to combat traditional practices injurious to the health of women and girls, including genital mutilation, and to involve men as well as women closely in that struggle.

25. Ms. OUEDRAOGO said she would like to know whether Guinea intended to ratify the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and whether children were involved in the activities of the Guinean Committee to Monitor the Protection of the Rights of Children and the activities conducted in connection with the month of the child. She also asked whether the Children's Code would be prepared in the light of the principles enshrined in the Convention and would like details concerning the manner in which child-related NGOs coordinated their activities and cooperated with the Government, as well as information about their funding and their role in implementing children's programmes. In conclusion, the Guinean delegation would perhaps explain how

the Government was ensuring that the different traditional networks entrusted with dissemination of the Convention all spoke the same language and coordinated their activities.

26. Ms. SARDENBERG said that the high level of the Guinean delegation attested to the importance the Guinean Government attributed to the Convention. She also congratulated Guinea on its ratification of the six major international human rights instruments and for having frankly recognized in its report the difficulties encountered in enforcing the Convention.

27. She wondered about the coordination of the work of the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Promotion of Women and Children, the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Civic Education and the other ministries dealing with child-related issues. Given the proportion of illiterates and blind people in the country, she also asked whether there were plans to establish a simplified version and a Braille version of the text of the Convention. She would also like more detailed information on the role of the imams and "griots" ("masters of the word") in society as a whole and in the dissemination of the Convention in particular. Turning to planning, legislation and monitoring of implementation, she asked how national programmes of action were integrated and evaluated, whether there were plans to adopt texts concerning children that had been drafted but not yet published and what measures were envisaged for improving the workings of the Guinean Committee to Monitor the Protection of the Rights of Children. She would also like details concerning the mandate of the Committee on Equity between Girls and Boys and its links with the other governmental organs. In conclusion, she asked what specific measures the Government intended to adopt to disseminate the initial report in the country: would a press conference be organized? Would the report be discussed in parliament?

28. Ms. MBOI, noting that the previous National Programme of Action covered women as well as children, asked whether there were plans to adopt one relating specifically to children and their own rights and, if so, whether it would target all children, including the children of refugees, and all the rights set forth in the Convention.

29. Ms. MOKHUANE, referring to the new National Programme of Action, asked what its objectives were and whether it provided for a mechanism for periodic presentation of reports on implementation of the Convention. Also, aware that five of the countries neighbouring on the Republic of Guinea were involved in armed conflicts, she would like to know what share of the Guinean budget was earmarked for defence. She also asked whether children could appeal to an independent body in the event of violation of their rights. Lastly, concerned at the population's poverty, she asked what proportion of income was retained by the State, whether the poor were as heavily taxed as the rich, what was the extent of social security coverage and who benefited from it.

30. Mr. RABAH would like to have more details about the decrees listed in paragraph 9 of the initial report and how they were enforced. He also wondered about the participation of NGOs and United Nations specialized agencies not only in establishing the report, but in other governmental activities.

31. Ms. QUEDRAOGO, referring to paragraph 14 of the initial report, asked about the status of the projects envisaged when the report had been drafted. She understood that the Children's Parliament and the Association of Mayors for Defence of the Rights of the Child were now operational and wished to know how they functioned.

32. Mr. KOLOSOV pointed out that article 4 of the Convention imposed on States parties the obligation to undertake measures for the implementation of the rights of the child "to the maximum extent of (...) available resources". Had that topic been the subject of a parliamentary or governmental debate and had its significance been really grasped? What resources were available through international cooperation and were they really spent on the most needy population groups?

The meeting was suspended at 11.50 a.m. and resumed at noon.

33. Ms. DARABA (Guinea), referring to the view that the Arabic translation of the Convention should not pose problems because 80 per cent of the population was Muslim, pointed out that practice of the Muslim religion did not necessarily signify mastery of Arabic. What was more, the alphabet used by the Arabic-speaking segment of the population was not the same as that used in literary Arabic. In addition, while dissemination of the Convention did rely on public channels - central and decentralized State representation - it was also conducted through traditional channels. Accordingly, the "griots" were an asset for the country and compensated for the lack of State representation at the lower sub-prefecture levels. The message was transmitted by "griots", through children's rites of passage that existed in Guinean society, which had a rising birth rate, and through the NGOs, especially feminist NGOs. The major data-collection problems encountered were, first of all, the donors' excessively sectoral approach and, secondly, inadequate personnel training. In that regard, Guinea had called on South-South cooperation, especially on Egypt's Social Development Fund, for establishing a database.

34. Mr. DORÉ (Guinea) said that one of the aims of training executives was to ensure th[illegible]e executives in the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Promotion of Women and [illegible]dren used the same working methods as their counterparts in the other ministries; to that end, the Guinean Committee to Monitor the Protection of the Rights of Children was responsible for drawing up training plans for executives in all ministries. What was needed now was to work towards limiting the loss of information between middle management who gleaned information on the ground and the senior management in Conakry.

35. Acknowledging that the late presentation of the initial report was regrettable, he said that mechanisms - described in the written replies - had been set up to expedite the procedures for preparing periodic reports in the future.

36. The two main priorities of the National Plan of Action for the Guinean Child were to reduce the gap between town and country with regard to access to education, notably through the development of pre-school education and, secondly, assistance for children in difficulties, such as working children and street children. Lastly, he was pleased to inform the Committee that

Guinea had ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child at the Conference of Presidents of Member States of the Community of West African States, held in Addis Ababa in June 1996, and that the Charter was now part of Guinea's juridical arsenal.

37. In response to the questions concerning the Guinean Committee to Monitor the Protection of the Rights of Children, he pointed out that the Committee was now perfectly in place and operational. It was composed of representatives of, among others, the main NGOs and counterpart ministries and child representatives. The Committee also had commissions specializing in the various child-related sectors, such as leisure and sport, which cooperated with youth organizations to put on activities and performances illustrating what human rights really meant, especially in the countryside. In addition, the month of the child was certainly not just an occasion for festivities to celebrate childhood: it was also used for activities to increase awareness of, and respect for, the rights of the child and to encourage the population to campaign with the authorities to defend the cause of children. Hence, during the entire month, the private and public press, youth organizations, artists and all those concerned joined forces to attract the national community's attention to the importance of those rights. In addition, on 20 November, the date of the adoption of the Convention, specific activities were organized at the highest level to assess the previous year's achievements in order to improve the implementation of the provisions of the Convention.

38. Concerning relations between the Ministry of Youth and the department responsible for children in the Ministry of Social Affairs, he said that all activities conducted by both bodies were fully coordinated; they included initiatives taken at the instigation of organizations proposing sporting activities in schools, as well as coordination with the counterpart Ministry of Education and Ministry of Culture.

39. The initial foundations on which the Association of Mayors for the Defence for the Rights of the Child would be built had been laid in 1997 and the Association had officially come into being in May 1998. It was an association of mayors who undertook to guarantee children's rights in their local communities. Thus, in order to encourage girls to attend school, which was one of the Guinean Government's priorities, the mayors belonging to the Association undertook to take steps to ensure that girls who had completed the six years of compulsory primary education in their native villages and had been accepted by an urban college were looked after by a foster family on their arrival and a tutor designated to help them with their studies. In addition, the mayors of the Association were obliged to help apprenticed children and enforce their rights with the master craftsmen so that they could gain the diploma that would grant them access to employment once their apprenticeship was at an end. Lastly, the creation of the Children's Parliament had been highly problematic, since it had not been easy to make the community as a whole, and parents in particular, accept that children, even those not attending school and not part of society's elite, could have the right to be elected as members of Parliament to represent their sub-prefectures on an equal footing with adult parliamentarians. For that reason, a protracted sensitization campaign had had to be carried out before the Children's Parliament could be created. However, 114 children now sat in Parliament (one child for each seat in the National Assembly) and those young

parliamentarians, who were generally 14 or 15 years of age, had become spokespersons for their peers and defended their interests in all fields concerning them, making it an excellent school for introduction to democracy.

40. Ms. DIABY (Guinea) added that the month of the child had been celebrated each year in Guinea since 1990, when Guinea had deposited the instrument of ratification of the Convention with the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Throughout the month, special days covering a variety of themes were celebrated in favour of children: for example, 1 June was devoted to celebrating the International Day of the Child; 5 June to the celebration of World Environment Day; 15 June celebrated the Day of the African Child, and 26 June International Day of Peace. Those celebrations were held throughout the national territory, with active support from UNICEF.

41. Guinea had not expressed its opinion on the proposed amendment to the Convention with a view to increasing the number of members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child from 10 to 18, not from any lack of will on the Government's part, but simply because it had not received the relevant documents. Nevertheless, the Guinean Government would certainly undertake a study and communicate its response in the second periodic report it would be submitting to the Committee.

42. She pointed out that the Guinean Committee to Monitor the Protection of Rights of Children had been created by Decree 010 of 16 January 1995 and was an official monitoring mechanism for implementation of the Convention in the country. Following the Committee's creation, two orders had been issued concerning its membership, the one establishing 18 as the number of members and the other increasing it to 20, in view of the scope of the activities now being implemented in the field. All the major ministries were represented on the Committee, including the Ministry of Cooperation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was the repository of the international juridical instruments the country had ratified. Furthermore, the Committee could seek the collaboration of representatives of international institutions, who could help to carry out its activities. Lastly, the NGOs had played a considerable part in the preparation of Guinea's initial report and continued to contribute, notably to the re-assessment of syllabuses and the development of an entire array of activities for children.

43. Mr. CAMARA (Guinea) said that the Guinean Government was doing its utmost to provide social coverage for all children, whatever their social origins, although the country's scant resources made it difficult to guarantee social coverage and health care for everyone, including the worst-off financially. However, as a first step, the Government had undertaken to apply an extended inoculation programme for all children and, thanks to help from its development partners, a network of nearly 350 primary health centres dispensing free essential care had been established throughout the country. Following that, the Government had created a sub-programme for distribution of basic medicine, especially in rural areas, a policy that formed part of the overall measures to decentralize health care, which had been undertaken since 1984.

44. The social coverage system per se generally concerned wage-earners, namely people in remunerated employment, either with the Government or with

private enterprise. Under that system, the wage-earners received family allowances for themselves and their family members and any medical expenses were reimbursed. Government employees' benefits were paid with their salaries and, for salaried employees in firms, payment of allowances was governed by the Labour Code and medical expenses were covered by the National Social Security Fund. Hence, in the past 10 years the expenditure devoted to primary health care had increased considerably, owing particularly to trade-union action which had encouraged wage-earners to capitalize on legislative provisions in their favour.

45. Mr. DARABA (Guinea), in response to questions asked about measures taken to combat traditional practices injurious to the health of women and children, said that genital mutilation in particular was prohibited by the Guinean Penal Code. However, genital excision as a surgical procedure formed part of the various rites involved in the teaching and initiation of girls, in the same way as the teaching of good habits of daily hygiene, physical care and food, for instance. True, the struggle against that practice, which, in fact had no basis in religion, was nevertheless justified, which was why a multidisciplinary team comprising anthropologists, sociologists, doctors and pharmacists, among others, had been set up to look into the possibility of instituting traditional initiation rites that did not include genital mutilation and for which preference would be accorded to maintaining positive practices that formed part of the Guinean population's cultural heritage.

46. The CHAIRPERSON thanked the Guinean delegation for its initial replies to the questions raised by Committee members on the first part of the list of issues.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.

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GE.99-40193 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Guinea (CRC/C/3/Add.48; HRI/CORE/1/Add.80; CRC/C/Q/GUI/1; written replies by the Government of Guinea to the questions raised in the list of issues) (continued)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Guinea took places at the Committee table.

2. Mrs. DARABA (Guinea) said that, upon her return to Guinea, she would hold a press conference to inform the public how the Government had replied to the questions asked by the Committee and what the Committee's recommendations had been.

3. She was not in a position to say what the national defence budget was, but five out of the six countries bordering upon Guinea were engaged in civil wars or armed conflicts, and the Government had therefore had to take drastic steps to ensure its own people's security and that of the millions of refugees on its territory. One seventh of the population consisted of refugees, 60 per cent of whom were women and children, and that weighed very heavily on the national budget.

4. The highest level of follow-up mechanism for the Convention within the Government was the National Commission on Population and Human Resources, composed of the seven ministers responsible for the national development plan, agriculture, health, education and social affairs; it met once every six months to monitor implementation of the Convention. There was also a specialized subcommission on children's rights.

5. Income tax rates depended, of course, on the level of income, some people not being taxed at all. Some of the Government's programmes concerned with children had been exempted from the payment of taxes over the past 12 months, despite the structural adjustment programme in place.

6. Mr. DORÉ (Guinea) said that the National Programme of Action (NPA) took account of the distribution of expenditure among the Government's partners in the field, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Government itself. What NGOs did in the field was often modified by national policy priorities. Concretely, in the matter of pre-school education, the Programme consisted of nursery schools in the rural areas that relied on community efforts to get children to attend them. In the urban areas, private interests were encouraged to open nursery schools, and the State was building schools designed to inspire the private sector. Education had been liberalized in Guinea in 1984 and private-sector nursery schools had begun to appear.

7. The Government not only encouraged child workers to defend their rights and turn to their own associations for support, it also combated the most serious forms of child labour through a programme aimed at reducing the number of children forced to work in order to survive. There were plans to build

reintegration centres for those children and to separate children from adults in penal institutions. Girls working as street vendors attended literacy centres and "second chance" centres in order to learn a trade or go to school.

8. Mr. KEITA (Guinea) said that the "20-20" initiative meant that 20 per cent of the national development budget was allocated to the social sector in exchange for bilateral aid, which took the form of forgiveness of 20 per cent of the national debt. In 1999, social sector spending would reach 18.78 per cent of the budget and the 20 per cent target would be reached by the end of 2001.

9. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the Committee to ask questions concerning the definition of the child, general principles, and civil rights and freedoms.

10. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO said that, according to the initial report, men under 18 years and women under 17 years could not contract marriage (para. 15). She would like to know what practical steps were taken to enforce that law, particularly in the rural areas. Moreover, the gender-based age difference for marriage constituted discrimination and should be eliminated. As to the age of recruitment for the army, the report stated that measures were being adopted to eliminate that discrimination (para. 16). She would like to hear what those measures were and whether girls were required to do national service. Children were released from compulsory schooling at the age of 16 (para. 17): and it would be interesting to learn what steps were taken to ensure that they stayed in school until that age.

11. Young persons under the age of 16 could be hired for work only with the consent of the authority upon which they depended (para. 17). That usually meant the parents, which could be dangerous for children, particularly children from families with economic problems, who would be pushed out to work without finishing their compulsory schooling. Were there any measures to prevent that type of situation?

12. The report also acknowledged the existence of discrimination by reason of birth against children born out of wedlock and children of adultery and incest (para. 23), stating that the legislature had taken account of the sociocultural context. The matter should be reconsidered, as such children must have the same rights as all others.

13. The report further acknowledged that girls did not inherit from their fathers. That constituted discrimination, and steps must be taken to alter that situation. The report referred to the need for a large-scale campaign of dissemination, information and sensitization to bring citizens to settle their succession differences before the courts. The Government should also take into account the situation of children born out of wedlock so as to enable them to enjoy their rights, particularly those enshrined in the Convention.

14. Mr. DORÉ (Guinea) said that the minimum age limits for marriage of 18 for men and 16 for women, were specified in the Family Code, although some exceptions could be made. The Code also provided that no young person could marry without the consent of his parents or guardians. Every person had the right to a paternal or family name and one or more first names. Children born

out of wedlock whose filiation was established in respect of one parent only took that parent's name. An attempt had been made to settle problems of succession without distinction as to filiation or sex.

15. Structures existed to enable children to express their opinions in traditional society without shocking adults and attempts were being made to transform the traditional "joking relations" (parentés à plaisanterie) into modern forms of expression; the Children's Parliament was one such example.

16. All births on Guinean territory had to be declared. It was true that that requirement was not applied strictly in all rural areas, but efforts were under way to make it easier to locate birth certificates, with dates of birth being recorded in village notebooks kept in Arabic or French.

17. Parents' irresponsibility towards their children was severely punished under the Penal Code, as were crimes against newborn babies, incitement to debauchery, crimes against children and young people and abuse of the needs of juveniles. In addition, there was a campaign during every month of June, the month of the Guinean child, when attempts were made to publicize all those legal provisions, as citizens were often not familiar with the law.

18. Mrs. MBOI said that her earlier questions about the age of sexual consent and medical consultation had still not been answered, nor had she found out whether any indicators had been developed and data collected on all the rights under the Convention, particularly with respect to the children of refugees and migrant workers. She wished to know whether the Government had a central statistical bureau to facilitate data collection.

19. Was there a separate section within the National Programme of Action in which children would be considered as citizens in their own right, and not just as part of the plan of action for women? Had the Government's evaluation of training and dissemination efforts made a difference; had the training really helped to change attitudes towards children?

20. According to information received, there was a political commitment in Guinea to improve the human rights situation there. The main human rights NGOs had been recognized, particularly the Guinean Organization of Human Rights, which was playing a key role in the promotion and protection of human rights. Did that organization concern itself also with the rights of the child in connection with the promotion and protection of human rights in general? Were the rights of children put forward as real problems for consideration by the Government?

21. According to the report, legislation protected the best interests of the child, but she would like some examples. In the case of a divorce or a dispute over a child, for example, she would like to know what action a judge would take to protect the best interests of the child. Upon ratification, the Convention automatically became a part of domestic law but it was unclear how that worked in practice in the legal system.

22. Infant mortality rates were very high and she wondered whether that was due to abortions. She wished to know, therefore, what the statistics were for maternal mortality resulting from botched abortions, whether abortions were legal and, if so, what was being done to protect the right to life of unborn infants.

23. Mrs. PALME said that, according to the statistics, there were far more boys than girls in school. In addition, girls did not have equal inheritance rights in Muslim Guinean society. She asked the delegation to elaborate. Were the rights of children born out of wedlock not recognized? Did Guinea intend to ratify the 1993 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption and ILO Convention No. 138 concerning the minimum age for admission to employment? Could children discuss matters of concern to them with their parents and in school settings? She was worried by the statement in the report indicating a possibly old-fashioned patriarchal attitude in Guinean society. More information was needed on the Children's Parliament and the mayors' association, which were very important initiatives.

24. Mr. RABAH said that, with respect to the right of inheritance, Guinean legislation made no distinction between the sexes but the Muslim community, which constituted two thirds of the population, did so. Had the Government entered any reservations to the Convention in that regard and, if not, how did it explain that discrimination? The delegation had indicated that corporal punishment was prohibited by the Penal Code; that presumably meant that a child thus abused by his parents or by someone else could complain to the courts. Examples would be useful. With regard to the age of criminal liability, it appeared that children could not be sentenced before reaching the age of 18. He wished to know, therefore, what happened to those who committed offences before reaching that age. In the event of divorce, children under the age of seven were, according to the report, entrusted to their mothers. If that was always the case, it would seem that the judge was not empowered to consider the best interests of the child, whereby the children of divorced parents might be entrusted to their father or, indeed, to other persons.

25. Mr. KOLOSOV, having asked whether the Guinean authorities were in favour of the amendment to the Convention by which the membership of the Committee would be increased from 10 to 18, said that the age of majority in Guinea was currently set at 21 years, so that young people aged 18 to 21 were not protected by the Convention, which applied only to persons under 18. Since such persons were not regarded as full citizens either, they were in a very uncomfortable situation. In other countries where that situation applied, serious consideration was being given to lowering the age of majority to 18. The Guinean Government should examine that possibility.

26. He recommended that consideration should be given to introducing compulsory birth registration for immigrant families, since the Convention required that child rights should apply to all children under a State party's jurisdiction. The use of the term "legitimate" in paragraphs 51 and 52 of the initial report should be replaced by less discriminatory terminology.

27. Mrs. MOKHUANE asked whether any agreement existed between Guinea and its neighbours with regard to the birth registration of refugee children. The Committee had been informed about the ways in which participation rights were exercised in the public sphere, but not about the ways in which they were guaranteed within the family. What was being done to raise parents' understanding of their children's right to express their views and participate in issues that were important to their well-being?

28. Mrs. SARDENBERG, having welcomed the global approach adopted by the State party, as reflected in the celebration of Children's Day, said that the momentum thus achieved could be used to convey the holistic nature of children's rights. Had any studies been carried out on the impact of ethnic tensions on children? Was the Government concerned by the evident disparities between male and female adults and children and between the rural and urban populations? Had any programmes or measures been introduced with a view to achieving a more balanced enjoyment of rights, particularly for girl children, for instance by reducing the disparity in illiteracy rates. Was the Committee on Equity between Girls and Boys active in the homes and in the schools to counter the problem of domestic violence which obviously affected children?

29. With respect to paragraph 9 of the list of issues and the corresponding written reply, she would like to know whether the Government had taken any steps to reduce discrimination against girl children in school, particularly when they were pregnant? In the light of the provisions contained in article 12 of the Convention, she was concerned by the information that, since children belonged to their parents, the enjoyment of their rights was subject to parental permission. Did people understand the significance of birth registration as a basis of citizenship and was there any disparity between the number of births and the number of registrations?

30. Mrs. PALME asked whether there was any intention to amend the laws relating to traditional practices so as to ensure that the right not to be subjected to torture was respected.

31. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether the information to which children might be exposed through advances in technology was censored in any way. Given that children were considered to be virtually chattels of the family, she wondered what society's attitude to corporal punishment was. The fact that children were imprisoned with adults provided considerable potential for cruel treatment. In the matter of child participation, which aspects of the Convention elicited most response when it was discussed by children?

32. Mrs. DARABA (Guinea), replying to the question concerning the censorship of violent material, said that the Ministries of Education and Culture had conducted awareness-raising campaigns and that the Interministerial Council and the National Information Council had issued directives that violent films should not be shown on television or in the cinema.

33. By way of example of the involvement of human rights organizations in the area of child rights, a joint discussion of child rights as human rights between the Guinea Organization of Human Rights, the National Teachers' Union and the Association of Women Jurists had concluded that children's rights were on a par with those of any adult, however prominent. Such discussions served to raise awareness of the Convention.

34. On the subject of inheritance, positive law contained no discrimination against women, but customary practice on occasion prevailed over theory. The situation would be remedied only when parents and women themselves became aware that such discrimination was not acceptable. The harmonization of Koranic law and positive law was under study.

35. The low level of school attendance by girls was not to be attributed solely to poverty but also to other factors such as inappropriate curriculum content which failed to respond to the population's practical concerns. In some outlying rural areas, no school existed within daily travelling distance. That problem could not be solved by the Ministry of Education alone but called for concerted action in a number of different spheres, which was hampered by the excessively sectoral approach of aid donors.

36. The effectiveness of the training on Convention rights for law-enforcement personnel, judges and teachers was apparent in the reduction in the level of violence against children in areas where such training programmes had been offered. While the custody of children under the age of seven had formerly been automatically given to mothers after a divorce, the new Family Code was based on the best interests of the child and provided for the possibility of awarding custody to the father or to a third person. That approach was consistent with customary law under which nephews and nieces had the same right to full protection as a couple's own children.

37. It was indeed unfortunate that the new Family Code did not provide the same rights to children born of incest as to other children. However, the question was an extremely sensitive one in Guinea and the mere mention of the subject in the text had almost caused the entire Code to be rejected. It had therefore been decided to concentrate on mainstream children and to provide for consideration on a case-by-case basis of the situation of children born of incest.

38. Ways and means were being found to respect children's views in Guinean society. Cases of corporal punishment had indeed been reported and were generally referred to the Legal Aid Centre which investigated the complaint and decided on appropriate action.

39. In regard to refugees, the national borders in the region were entirely artificial, with the result that a single ethnic group, with a single language, might be divided between two or more countries. Extensive migration occurred between the countries of the subregion and, under the Constitution of Guinea, refugees enjoyed the same protection as nationals.

40. Mrs. DIABY (Guinea) said that, in the event of a divorce, a social inquiry might be conducted to ascertain the child's best interests and children over the age of 13 could be interviewed by the judge responsible for awarding custody.

41. Turning to the matter of the protection of rights, she said that Guinea had ratified all the essential international instruments that had a bearing on the rights of children, and that the Guinean courts proceeded in conformity with the law. The Ministry for Social Affairs, Women and Children assisted and counselled women, particularly illiterate women, concerning problems related to, inter alia, maintenance obligations and abandonment, and helped them to prepare their cases and submit them to the competent judge. Although Guinea was in a period of active legal reform, and the Civil Code had been updated in 1998, no changes had been made in the provisions governing birth registration.

42. It was important to recognize that the Government of Guinea had undertaken considerable efforts on behalf of refugees, and especially refugee children with special needs, such as unaccompanied children. With the assistance of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Ministry had developed a programme that conducted research, at the regional level, to find the parents of such children, and to reunite them with their families. In conformity with the provisions of the Geneva Conventions, the Guinean Government consulted the appropriate embassies with a view to returning children whose parents could not be found to their countries of origin.

43. Under domestic law, all children born on Guinean soil had a right to citizenship when they attained the age of majority. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) managed a programme which coordinated the birth registration of refugees. Under the previous Civil Code, the time limit for registration had been three days; the new Civil Code had extended that period to 15 days in order to make it easier for parents to register their newborn children.

44. Any person who engaged in sexual relations with a minor under the age of 13 was punishable under criminal law. The law did not specify the age at which a child could consult a doctor in his own right. As a general rule, however, a child was treated as a member of the family until the age of 15. After that age, he could consult a doctor on his own; many services and centres were available, including those which provided reproductive health services.

45. Guinean law explicitly protected the right to life and the physical integrity of the person. Under the Penal Code, acts of violence against any individual were forbidden; sentences were heavier for violence committed against a child. Although the national laws governing inheritance made no distinction between girls and boys, there were significant discrepancies in some communities between law and practice. If, however, the relatives of a child appealed to the courts, the judge was obliged to take a decision in conformity with the law. Unfortunately, however, national laws were sometimes overlooked or misunderstood by those responsible for enforcing them.

46. The law distinguished between legitimate children, natural children, legitimized children, and children born of adultery or incest. A child born of an adulterous relationship could appeal to the courts for paternal recognition but was entitled only to subsistence, which meant food. Such a child was considered a social embarrassment in Guinea, and such matters were rarely even discussed.

47. Lastly, she was sure that the Government would willingly consider ratifying the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, since domestic law already provided for both international and national adoption.

48. Mr. DORÉ (Guinea) said that Guinea had established a network of parent associations the purpose of which was to encourage illiterate parents to send their children to school. It was difficult to assess to what extent parents and children were familiar with the rights of the child. The Government had, however, put up posters and signs in public places and markets, drawing

attention to the Convention. Corporal punishment had been effectively prohibited in virtually all public and private schools. Classroom visits showed that the behaviour of teachers had changed. Under the law, school chores were the same for boys and girls, and discriminatory practices against girls had begun to abate. Boys carried water and swept floors, tasks traditionally assigned to girls.

49. A grave problem in Guinea was the traditional use of young children in mines to dig for gems and precious metals. The Government had conducted a campaign to inform employers and union leaders that the use of children in mines was prohibited, and had set up observatories to monitor the mining areas.

50. Mrs. DARABA (Guinea) said that Guinean children enjoyed the fundamental right to talk to their parents but that, as a result of increasing poverty and the flight from the land, parents were often too tired to devote much time to their children. The Government had, however, launched a series of television programmes to encourage dialogue between parents and children.

51. Violence was a problem of significant concern in Guinean society: parents must be encouraged to understand that a child who was brought up in an atmosphere of violence inevitably grew up to be violent and that, in order to lead a successful and happy life, a child must be brought up in a peaceful home. Efforts were being made to identify mechanisms that would introduce a sense of harmony and equilibrium into Guinean family life.

52. The delegation was unaware whether there existed an agreement between Guinea and neighbouring countries concerning the matter of birth registration. The situation was an exceptional one: civil conflict had erupted in those countries, bringing floods of refugees into Guinea. In the previous 10 years, the refugee population had grown to be one seventh of the total, constituting a heavy burden on the national budget and the country's natural resources. In fact, the influx of refugees had destroyed one third of the country's forests. Guinea nevertheless wished to provide a haven for persons in distress.

53. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the delegation to reply to the questions raised in the list of issues concerning family environment and alternative care, basic health and welfare, and education, leisure and cultural activities.

54. Mrs. DARABA (Guinea) said that the laws governing divorce in Guinea were among the most stringent in the region, designed as they were to protect the integrity of the family unit. Under the terms of the new Family Code, a child was placed with the parent most likely to guarantee his security. When, however, the parents were not married, the child belonged to the mother. Private care institutions were subject to strict controls to ensure that a child grew up in the best possible circumstances. With the exception of the SOS children's villages, all Guinean orphanages were managed by women. Some former inhabitants of those orphanages had grown up to hold important positions in society and Government and were currently contributing to their support.

55. It was a deplorable fact that more infants and more were being abandoned. A person who found such a child and did not wish to adopt him was obliged to inform the authorities; the child was then placed in an orphanage and grew up in the care of the State.

56. Community life played an important role in the upbringing of a child in Africa. When a child was abused, it was often the neighbours who lodged a complaint. Such a case would be brought first of all before the local authorities, who would decide whether to solve the problem locally or to refer the case to the courts. The Government had taken measures to publicize in the mass media the problem of parental violence against children.

57. It was important to remember that an unenforced law was of value to no one. Furthermore, Guinea had a high illiteracy rate. Before introducing new legislation, therefore the Government endeavoured to seek the views of the public with regard to the problem in question. Once a law was enacted, it sought to introduce it to the population through participatory measures. If local administrators did not accept or recognize a law, it could not be enforced.

58. In reply to the question concerning traditional medicine, she said that Guinea was a pioneer in that field and had a division within the Ministry of Health which dealt with traditional medicine and herbal remedies. University training for doctors and chemists contained a traditional medicine module and about 80 per cent of scientific degree theses were devoted to traditional medicine and herbs. The age-old opprobrium suffered by traditional medicine was on the way out, scientific studies having proven that it was a valuable resource once it had been denuded of quackery and swindling. Some 70 per cent of the population, especially in the rural areas, resorted first of all to traditional medicine. Guinea's national health policy was far in advance of many other countries with regard to traditional medicine; it had two traditional medical institutes, and she herself, as a specialist in traditional medicine, was negotiating with a bank to set up an African herbal remedies outlet.

59. On the situation of children with disabilities living outside special institutions, she explained that the State had itself created a situation of social injustice by establishing a "solidarity city", catering for 71 out of the country's 500,000 handicapped children, at quite a high cost, while the needs of the rest of those children remained unmet. The Government had since closed that establishment down and redirected its efforts to vocational training centres for young people with disabilities. In so doing, it was implementing the concept that disabled people constituted an integral part of society. The philosophy underlying their treatment was to reintegrate them into their original communities. Support was being provided by the University by various ministries and by a number of NGOs.

60. A five-year programme on adolescent health had been established with the assistance of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to ensure that sex education was available for young people nationwide. Through agreements signed in 1998, support for that effort was also provided by a number of donor organizations and specialized NGOs.

61. With regard to measures to prevent and combat traditional practices harmful to the health of children, especially female genital mutilation, she said that the Government was endeavouring to raise awareness and to find other sources of income - such as the cultivation of medicinal plants - for the women who performed that operation. While the training would take some time, she was convinced that the practice would gradually disappear.

62. Mr. DORÉ (Guinea), said that his Government had striven to develop human resources and make the elementary schools accessible to all children of the appropriate age. The result had been an annual average growth rate of 11.7 per cent, the emphasis having been placed on enrolment of girls. Drop-out rates had plummeted in both primary and secondary schools as a result of the incentive measures generated by the decentralization policy. Parents' associations had helped encourage the enrolment of children in school. In addition, nursery school attendance by children between the ages of 3 and 4 appeared to encourage them to settle into primary and secondary education.

63. Human rights education would be incorporated into the curriculum. Human rights, however, depended more on the functioning of democratic institutions. The very real separation of the executive branch from the legislature and the legislature from the judiciary meant that those branches all made separate contributions to the inhabitants' enjoyment of their rights. In that regard, training was also essential to ensure that all citizens were aware of their rights and how to defend them.

64. The CHAIRPERSON asked if the members of the Committee had any supplementary questions to put to the delegation.

65. Mrs. MBOI, said that, while paragraphs 76 and 77 of the initial report covered treatment of children separated from their parents in various instances of family breakdown, they were silent on the subject of ill-treatment and abuse - including sexual abuse - within the family. She wished to know what was being done to prevent such treatment in both natural and foster families, what programmes and services were available for the rehabilitation of abused children, and whether any programmes existed for treatment of abusers in order to prevent the perpetuation of such behaviour.

66. On the subject of adoption, she wished to know what was being done to discourage child traffic and the illicit transfer of children by means of informal adoption, especially in rural areas and where a household was headed by a poor woman.

67. On the topic of health and basic welfare, she was happy to learn that the Government was receiving international cooperation from various United Nations funds and agencies. There was still, however, many lacunae in the data on teenage pregnancies. Some 68 per cent of the women hospitalized for abortion complications were adolescents. She hoped that the Government was attempting to establish reliable statistics for Guinea since they were a prerequisite for effective policies, programmes and services.

68. She was alarmed at the high rates of malnutrition and of child mortality and morbidity attributable to diseases controllable by means of low-cost interventions. Had the Government given any consideration to international

cooperation with, for instance, the World Health Organization (WHO) in respect of health reform or integrated health management and the provision of health-care financing, with a particular focus on malnutrition?

69. She regretted that more recent statistics on HIV/AIDS had not been supplied. The Committee's concern was not only with the increasing numbers of children suffering from HIV/AIDS, but also with the impact the disease could have on children generally. Was there any aggressive strategy to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS and to counteract their impact upon children.

70. On the subject of reproductive health, she noted the problem of high fertility rates and low contraception use. She hoped that the problem could be attenuated with the support Guinea was receiving from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). However, she would like more information on how the Government planned to assist the families concerned.

71. While congratulating the Government on the strides it had made in the acceptance of traditional medicine, she wondered whether steps were being taken to protect children, in particular, from the misuse of herbal remedies.

72. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO commended the Guinean Government's interest in traditional medicine. In view of the problems relating to the literacy and training of traditional doctors, however, she suggested that consideration might be given to exchanging experience within the subregion. She wondered whether, as in the case of her own country, traditional products were accepted for sale by modern chemists; whether there was any collaboration between such chemists and the practitioners of traditional medicine and whether they exchanged information. She was greatly concerned, however, about the dosage of traditional medicines administered, as well as the enemas and forced feeding to which children were subjected. While aware that efforts were under way to discourage such unhealthy practices, she would like to know what difficulties had been encountered.

73. She congratulated the Government of Guinea on its progress with the eradication of female genital mutilation and urged it to develop its programmes aimed at discouraging women from resorting thereto. She would be interested to hear whether there was any system to denounce those who insisted on doing so, whether there was any monitoring mechanism and what punishment was in store for offenders.

74. She was unclear as to the meaning of the social assistance provided for the handicapped. What was the country doing to make the disabled more active and independent rather than mere recipients of welfare? She also wished to know what progress had been made with the elaboration of the sectoral policy document for management of handicapped persons referred to in paragraph 237 of the initial report.

75. Faced with the fact that increasing numbers of young people in the subregion were exposed to alcohol and drugs which precipitated accidents, including traffic accidents, she asked whether any plans were afoot for their protection.

76. Mr. KOLOSOV asked if it was true that there were insufficient recreational facilities for children, a dearth of specialized children's libraries and few specialized health centres for children suffering from HIV/AIDS.

77. He wondered whether the coexistence of State and private schools had led to disparities between rich and poor and between the salaries of teachers in the two types of school. He asked whether any special legislation had been established to ensure that the minimum standards required by article 29 of the Convention were met in schools of all types, including private schools.

78. Mrs. PALME said she wondered what further action could be taken to accelerate the increase in school enrolment rates. Referring to the observation in paragraph 142 of the initial report that enjoyment of the right to education had been strongly compromised by the earlier non-performance of the system, she wondered whether thought had been given in the country's planning to the adoption of the 20-20 approach between donors and Government, with a view to catering for all children.

79. She asked what plans Guinea had to combat the visible effects of poverty on health and education, combined with a supportive attitude to parental interaction, linking children's health care to their pre-school education.

80. Mr. RABAH, said he would like further information on the private institutions in which children with disabilities and children affected or infected by HIV/AIDS were placed. He also requests further details concerning the budget, as well as Government statistics in those areas.

81. Mrs. MOKHUANE, remarking on the high incidence of malnutrition asked whether there were any educational projects to teach pregnant women how to nurture their children after birth. Also, given the high illiteracy rate, she would like to know whether there were any programmes to encourage mother-child interaction in the interests of the child's psychosocial development.

82. While the delegation had spoken about education in general, it had not mentioned specialized education. She wondered whether there was any national programmes or legislation for implementing and monitoring specialized education and, if so, what obstacles they had encountered. She also wished to know whether there was a national policy to supplement the food needs of poor children at school and how successful it was.

83. She asked for details of suicide rates, the reasons for suicide and the methods used.

84. The initial report stated that one preventive measure used to combat alcoholism was restrictions on advertising; she wondered whether it had been successful. Given the large numbers of refugees in Guinea from neighbouring countries, she wished to know what steps had been taken, in compliance with article 39 of the Convention, for the psychosocial integration and rehabilitation of children who had been exposed to gross atrocities.

85. Mrs. MBOI said she wondered whether it would be possible to increase the 3 per cent of the national budget allocated to health in order to combat

Guinea's many preventable health problems and whether international and technical cooperation was needed for programmes and services to fight rising drug and substance abuse among the 10 to 18 age group. While the initial report claimed vast improvements in drop-out and enrolment rates between 1990 and 1994, the statistics showed that the global rate of abandonment had considerably worsened. She asked for statistics of the developments since 1994.

86. Mrs. SARDENBERG asked what mechanism was in place to guarantee the rights of children placed with relatives following the break-up of their families. Given the delegation's admission of strong parental authority in Guinea, were there arranged marriages based on interests other than those of the child? Was sex education for teenagers provided in the schools? What programmes existed for training schoolchildren for participation in society and were textbooks and curricula free of gender stereotyping?

87. The CHAIRPERSON, observing that disability measures were apparently restricted to the deaf and dumb, asked what facilities existed for children with motor and mental disabilities and how society and their families reacted to them. Was general teacher training adequate for Guinea's educational needs? If not, how did that lack and the pupil/teacher ratio affect the drop-out rate? She also wished to know the incidence of polygamy and its impact on children.

The meeting rose at 6.04 p.m.

UNITED NATIONS

CRC

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Distr.
GENERAL

CRC/C/SR.517
16 April 1999

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Twentieth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 517th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 20 January 1999, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Miss MASON

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CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (continued)

Initial report of Guinea (continued)

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GE.99-40219 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Guinea [CRC/C/3/Add.48; HRI/CORE/1/Add.80; CRC/C/3/Q/GUI.1 (list of issues); written replies of the Guinean Government to questions raised in the list of issues (document without a symbol distributed in the meeting room in French only)]

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Guinea resumed their places at the Committee table.

2. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO said that she was concerned about the unrestricted sale of medicines in "yard pharmacies" and asked what the Government was doing to control that practice. On the subject of education, she asked about the participation of parents in school life, particularly the role of parent-teacher and friends of schools associations, and the pupils' own participation in the adoption of decisions affecting them, both at school and in the Ministry of Education. She also requested details on the NAFA centres, the nature and function of which she had not fully understood. Were they apprenticeship centres and were pupils placed there at the end of their training? The Guinean Government's written reply to question 25 on the list of issues suggested that the Convention was taught only in elementary schools. She urged the Government to extend such education to secondary schools. Since there were nearly three times as many colleges as high schools, she wished to know whether the Guinean education system encouraged short-term education. She also wished to know the composition of the Equity Committee set up to promote schooling for girls and what progress had been made. In conclusion, she inquired whether the projects described in paragraphs 149, 150 and 151 of the report had been evaluated and extended to other schools and which of the projects cited in paragraph 158 had been implemented. She thought it would be wise for priorities to be established in that regard.

3. Mrs. MOKHUANE asked for details on mechanisms for monitoring the enforcement of the law governing the obligation of maintenance and on the maintenance-allowance ceiling. On the subject of disabled children, she had learned with interest that there were prevention programmes and procedures, but asked, firstly, whether those children's rights were protected by statutory provisions and, if so, whether they were effectively enforced and, secondly, whether members of certain professions, such as architects, were aware of and trained to meet the needs of disabled persons. She also requested additional information on the nature of the problems encountered in the anti-malaria campaign.

4. Mrs. PALME said that, since few political activities were open to children, she wished to know what methods were used to develop their sense of democracy.

5. Mr. RABAH, referring to chapter IV. F of the report, said that he wished to know how the Government monitored children's homes and foster care institutions. He also asked about the Republic of Guinea's stance on adoption and abortion, since it had not expressed any reservation to the Convention, but those practices were condemned by the Shariah.

6. Mrs. DARABA (Guinea), referring to the question of sexual abuse, said that the Penal Code imposed long prison terms and heavy fines on child abusers, but it made no provision for helping victims overcome their trauma because the lack of resources had prevented the necessary reception infrastructure from being set up. However, certain social workers in the counselling and reception centres planned for children living in difficult situations would probably receive specialized training. On the subject of the trade in children, she pointed out that, in Africa, a child was looked after by the community as much as by its parents, so that the risk was minimized. Thus far, there had only been one case of attempted unauthorized adoption and the authorities' reaction had discouraged any further attempts.

7. Replying to Mr. Rabah, she said that the institutions were visited regularly by social welfare inspectors. The main problem was that those institutions viewed such inspections as a quid pro quo for the subsidies they received from the State and were less likely to cooperate when the funds were not forthcoming.

8. She willingly admitted that Guinean society, which was overwhelmingly Muslim and in favour of a high birth rate, disapproved of abortion. Abortions were therefore usually performed clandestinely, making it difficult to establish statistics. However, the secular nature of the State was written into the Guinean Constitution and the Shariah was not applicable in public life.

9. With regard to the prevention of malnutrition, a national nutrition programme was currently under way and its aim was, inter alia, to eliminate changes in eating habits caused by urbanization and to boost local products. In that connection, the Government's decision to stop giving wholesalers foreign exchange to import foreign rice, which was cheaper and discouraged local producers, had also been helpful in promoting food security. In the field of child-disease prevention, Guinea was an example for the rest of Africa, notably for its immunization coverage against the main children's diseases. NGOs were very active in that field and a number of sensitization and primary-care programmes were currently being implemented with the cooperation of UNICEF, WHO and other donors. A campaign against STDs and AIDS had also been launched. Awareness-raising messages on television and in the press had been reasonably successful. The involvement of the Transport Workers' Union - its members were traditionally among the main transmitters of STDs - had been enthusiastic. The main problem was that those diseases were also often transmitted by refugees flocking from neighbouring war-torn countries and by Guineans who, having emigrated, especially to Côte d'Ivoire, returned to their native villages in the terminal stages of the disease. Traditional medicine was very present in Guinea and was used both for adults and for children. It was not only tolerated, but encouraged, since it had been part of the medical school curriculum for over 20 years under the auspices of OAU, which had published an African pharmacopoeia. Despite some resistance, relations between traditional doctors and so-called "modern" doctors were relatively cordial. Noting that more than 90 per cent of traditional doctors dispensing care to children were women, the Government had decided to launch a community health campaign not only against children's diseases, but, with the assistance of traditional medicine also to put a stop to female genital mutilation.

10. Mr. DORÉ (Guinea), replying to the question concerning adolescents involved in road accidents, said that the State had launched an awareness campaign to teach members of the Transport Workers' Union to encourage young people to be cautious. A set of driving laws had also been adopted.

11. In the field of education, it had to be acknowledged that there were not enough libraries for children, but there were great hopes for the network set up by commune mayors eager to promote the rights of the child.

12. While everyone recognized that all children should attend school, ensuring that they did so was not without problems and, in urban areas in particular, the State had allowed private initiatives to be taken to compensate for shortcomings. The situation was different in rural areas, where the State intervened on a large scale, took care of teacher training and appointments and ensured that schools were properly run. The Guinean authorities relied heavily on the private sector and international cooperation to encourage more girls to attend school. Some outstanding initiatives with regard to leisure activities had also been taken to use local materials to manufacture toys for children from deprived backgrounds. There was no sex education programme as such, but awareness campaigns had been launched in schools to encourage the use of condoms, but funds for those campaigns were also in short supply. To promote equality between boys and girls, an Equity Committee had been entrusted with the task of teaching more modern ideas and school textbooks had been revised and all the stereotypes they conveyed had been removed. Teachers had also attended workshops and learned to stop teaching outdated behaviour patterns. The parent-teacher associations were dynamic and helped resolve a great many problems. When the communes needed to build schools, for example, the associations helped raise funds. Every effort was being made to increase the enrolment rate from the current 51 per cent to 90 per cent by 2008, without losing sight of the fact that schools had to prepare children for their entry into working life.

13. In conclusion, he explained that applicants for jobs in children's homes and orphanages had to submit a file to the National Directorate for the Promotion of Children, which recruited the staff of those establishments.

14. Mrs. DIABY (Guinea) said that there were two types of adoption: simple adoption, by which a child was entrusted to a member of the family or taken in by a family friend, and perfect adoption, in which the person adopting could file an official adoption request with the courts and give the child his name, provided that there was an age difference of at least 15 years between him and the adopted child. The Guinean Civil Code recognized international adoption, and that meant a foreign adult could adopt a Guinean child. All international adoptions went through diplomatic channels; in other words, a foreign family wishing to adopt a child first submitted an application to the Guinean embassy in its country. The application was then transmitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and later to the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Promotion of Women and Children.

15. When a father abandoned the family home and a complaint was filed against him by his wife or in the event of divorce, a civil court ruled on the matter and determined the amount of the maintenance allowance, depending on

the husband's resources. Judicial remedies were available in the event of failure to pay the maintenance allowance. Family violence could also be prosecuted in the courts.

16. Progress had been made in combating AIDS, but special facilities to take care of children with AIDS were still very inadequate.

17. Pregnant women could go to a specialized institute in Conakry for nutrition counselling.

18. Replying to a question on the country's suicide rate, she said that suicide was not a problem in Guinea, where religion continued to play a dominant role.

19. The Ministry of Social Affairs and the Promotion of Women and Children was trying to make the population aware of the negative aspects of arranged or endogamous unions and "cradle" or early marriages. In that connection as well, programmes would be required to change attitudes and behaviour.

20. Mrs. DARABA (Guinea) said that people married for money in Guinea, as in all countries. There were, of course, rich merchants who wished to marry young girls from large families who agreed for financial reasons, but that was not a very common practice. In any case, the legislation prohibited marriage between a man and a woman when the age difference was more than 25 years in order to prevent the most blatant cases.

21. Sex education courses in schools were undeniably important, but what made them effective was mainly skill in conveying ideas without offending parents' sensitivity or prompting children to engage in licentious behaviour.

22. All persons had their place in Guinean society - children, adults, the disabled, the elderly - and the high quality of human relations made for close family and social ties.

23. Part of the Conakry socio-medical centre had been set aside for mentally handicapped persons and their parents following a subregional workshop for West Africa held in 1997.

24. One member of the Committee had asked whether the very high teacher-pupil ratio - or supervision rate - might not explain the country's high drop-out rate. It was true that, under pressure from the population's great demand for education, associations and NGOs had built schools and there were now more schools than teachers. Unfortunately, there were sometimes more than 100 children per class. The Ministry of Social Affairs and the Promotion of Women and Children was working in cooperation with the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Civic Education to establish a national social service by which young diploma-holders would work for one or two years in social services, such as education, health, agriculture, environmental protection, and thus help compensate for the shortage of teachers.

25. Polygamy had an undeniably traumatizing effect on children, but it was wrong to say that it was authorized by the Koran. What was true, however, was that men had interpreted Islamic law to suit themselves. With a view to

curbing that deplorable tendency, the Guinean authorities were trying to explain to women that Islam did not authorize a man to have several wives. The practice had been going on for centuries, however, and it could not be abolished in a day.

26. The unlawful sale of medicaments continued to be a problem. A law prohibited it, but its enforcement left much to be desired, owing to the lack of resources. A seven-phase interministerial campaign against the unlawful sale of medicaments had been set in motion. The third phase was currently under way, but it was a lengthy process because the authorities wished to be sure of eliminating the scourge once and for all.

27. In reply to a question by Mrs. Palme on freedom of association, she said that there was an order allowing associations to be formed in the country, provided that they were apolitical. Civic training for young people was provided by the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Civic Education. Generally speaking, there was very keen political awareness among the population, perhaps because the country had been governed for 25 years by a single party which had had a very strong ideological grip. Political debate in Guinea was often organized along tribal or ethnic lines and, by getting involved, NGOs were very helpful in reducing tensions among the parties. The Equity Committee, which had existed for many years, was at present being restructured to make it more effective.

28. In conclusion, she said that, in order to achieve all its objectives, Guinea would need the support of the international community, especially in the form of technical assistance and North-South and South-South exchanges.

29. The CHAIRPERSON invited the Guinean delegation to reply to the unanswered questions on the following topics: the impact of ethnic tensions on children; measures in favour of disabled children; the implementation of the mother-and-infant programme; the school meals programme for poor children; prevention of alcoholism and drug abuse; the reintegration of child victims of armed conflicts; the monitoring of children in foster care and action to combat malaria and the ill-treatment of children in institutions.

30. Mrs. MBOI asked what measures the Government was taking to enhance the quality of education and school performance, to improve immunization coverage which, according to WHO, had apparently fallen between 1994 and 1997, to implement the Bamaki initiative and to improve the quality and accessibility of health care. In that connection, did the Government plan to increase the health budget and collaborate with WHO?

31. It would also be useful to know whether the anti-HIV/AIDS campaign had proved effective, whether measures were being taken to encourage young people to use condoms and to prevent the mother-to-infant transmission of the virus. As things stood, certain projections put the number of children whose parents would have died of AIDS by the year 2005 at 100,000. The Guinean delegation might also wish to indicate what obstacles the Government was encountering, especially in terms of attitudes, in the implementation of its family-planning policy.

32. Mrs. DARABA (Guinea) said that elections sometimes involved inter-ethnic violence which reflected political divisions and of which children were the main victims. During the last presidential elections, the Ministry of Decentralization and the Interior had therefore launched a broad awareness campaign calling on citizens to vote peacefully. The policy had worked and would therefore be reintroduced for the municipal elections due to take place in six months' time.

33. There was a community rehabilitation programme for disabled persons and the State had created a school for deaf-mutes, a school for the blind and an institute for young blind people. During the current year, the State would be spending US$ 250,000 to finish building an institute for young blind people in Kankan, in an area where river blindness was endemic. Moreover, a US$ 15,000 loan had recently been made available to buy equipment for the speech-therapy laboratory at the school for deaf-mutes. With the collaboration of Handicap International, moreover, the State would create an equipment centre for the disabled in the country's three main cities.

34. She pointed out that the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Promotion of Women and Children had not been involved in the implementation of social programmes, such as the mother-and-infant programme and the programme of psychological care for child victims of violence and therefore did not have statistics that could be used to evaluate their effectiveness. The Ministry hoped very shortly to join the monitoring committee for those programmes, including the Programme of Psychological Support for Refugee Children, in which UNHCR was taking part, in order to have a say in their implementation.

35. As far as nutrition was concerned, the Government was carrying out a school meals project for poor children in kindergartens and day-care centres in cooperation with the World Food Programme. The country's First Lady had had a kindergarten for the children of underprivileged families built and it would open soon.

36. With regard to drug addiction, the Government had concluded a number of agreements with the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNIDCP). Technical assistance in that field was sorely needed. UNESCO was also helping Guinea set up a shelter for young drug addicts.

37. As to the monitoring of children placed in foster homes, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Promotion of Women and Children did not have the necessary resources to guarantee the enforcement of the relevant legislation.

38. Food security, health and education were the Government's three main priorities. Sixty per cent of civil servants worked for the Ministries of Health and Education. Thousands of classrooms had been built in the past three years and teacher training had been strengthened. Aware that education was the key to development, the Government was borrowing to invest in that sector.

39. The Association of Women Engineers had worked with the Guinean Federation of Associations of Disabled Persons to draft a bill on improved access for the disabled to public buildings.

40. Problems linked to sexually transmitted diseases, such as AIDS, alcoholism and drug addiction, were being aggravated by the inflow of refugees from neighbouring countries. In this connection as well, the Government was unable to remedy the situation because it did not have enough resources.

41. Family planning had hitherto been seen as a medical matter. For such a policy to be effective, it was necessary to sensitize the population and change attitudes, particularly by involving young people, women's organizations and religious leaders in its implementation.

42. Mr. DORÉ (Guinea), in reply to question 26 on the list of issues, said that Guinea currently provided shelter for over 1 million refugees from neighbouring countries. No budget item was directly earmarked for refugee children, but the Government had set up a national coordination office, the staff and operating costs of which were charged to the national development budget.

43. Replying to question 27, he said that all placements of children in institutions (orphanages, homes, shelters) came under the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Promotion of Women and Children. An institute for young blind people, a rehabilitation centre for young people in conflict with the law and a reception and guidance centre for street children had been built in Kankan, Kindia and Conakry, respectively, for the physical and psychological rehabilitation and social reintegration of the adolescents concerned.

44. Replying to question 28, he said that minors were separated from adults in the main prison in Conakry. There were plans to build minors' quarters in the country's main prisons. With regard to the living conditions of detained minors, the Government had provided training for prison staff in collaboration with UNICEF and items such as mats, blankets and shoes were distributed to young detainees.

45. In reply to question 29, he said that there was a consultative committee on labour and social legislation. Advisory commissions had been established by job sector, with the assistance of the National Office for Vocational and Further Training in order to train child apprentices. A 1998 survey had put the numbers of young apprentices at 50,000 in Conakry alone.

46. In order to combat drug trafficking (question 30), the Government had set up a national anti-drug committee and a central anti-drug office which had begun cooperating with the African Anti-Drug Programme.

47. In reply to question 30, he acknowledged that data collection on sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children was inadequate. Guinea lacked staff with the skills to perform that task and also encountered cultural problems. There were, however, plans to conduct a survey on that topic in 1999, to be funded by UNICEF and the ILO. The Government was nevertheless cooperating with NGOs that were conducting training, awareness and prevention activities for young people who were most exposed to such practices.

48. In reply to question 32, it should be pointed out that children from ethnic minorities in Guinea enjoyed no special rights because, under the Constitution, all citizens were equal before the law. However, it must be

admitted that inequalities in access to education and social services did exist, especially in the more remote areas, a situation exacerbated by the influx of refugees. In December 1998 and January 1999 alone, Guinea had accepted 100,000 new refugees, many of them children.

49. Mrs. MBOI urged the Guinean Government to conduct a study on the sexual exploitation of children and to prepare a strategy to combat that practice. She believed that many girls prostituted themselves in order to increase their family income.

50. Furthermore, she understood that there was no minimum legal age for consent to sexual relations. Did that mean that a man who had sexual relations with a very young girl was not penalized?

51. It would also be useful to know how many minors were in detention and what measures had been taken to prevent the sexual abuse of which they might be victims.

52. On the subject of child labour, the Guinean delegation might indicate how it gave effect to article 32 of the Convention, which recognized the right of the child to be protected from performing any work that was likely to interfere with his education or to be harmful to his health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

53. Mrs. SARDENBERG asked what the State party intended to do to improve the detention conditions of young offenders. According to some sources, children had died during detention from malnutrition and disease.

54. It would also be useful to know what measures the State had taken to teach children respect for the natural environment (art. 29 of the Convention).

55. The Guinean Government might also inform the Committee of the areas in which international cooperation could be strengthened.

56. Mrs. PALME said that she would like to have more specific information on how the Government dealt with the problem of refugees, the majority of whom were children. With regard to children in detention and in conflict with the law, the report showed that the Government had interesting projects, but lacked the means to execute them. It was regrettable that there were no special institutions for young offenders and that they could be sentenced to very long terms (up to 10 years in prison). The fact that the punishment of minors guilty of certain offences was left to the discretion of a police court (para. 114 of the report) might well give rise to violations of the rights of the child. On the question of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, the Guinean Government could perhaps draw inspiration from the Declaration and Plan of Action of the 1996 World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. It would also be a good idea for it to establish cooperation with UNICEF and neighbouring countries on a global plan of action to deal with those problems.

57. Mr. RABAH, referring to the sentences imposed on minors, said that there was a contradiction between the last sentence of paragraph 105 and the last

sentence of paragraph 115 of the report. He would like to know exactly what the situation of young offenders detained at police stations was. Since the number of minors in prison seemed to be very low, it could be asked what obstacles were preventing the construction of rehabilitation centres. Were minors entitled to legal aid? Were they followed up by social workers on their release from prison and what types of offence did they usually commit? It might be a good idea for new legislation to be prepared for young offenders with a view to improving the administration of justice for minors in the years to come. Did judges, lawyers and social workers in contact with young offenders receive special training?

58. Mr. KOLOSOV said that it was rather difficult to take part in the preparation of conclusions and recommendations on the report before receiving all the replies - and full replies at that - to the questions asked. He would therefore like the delegation to reply to the question on the existence or otherwise of recreational facilities and libraries designed especially for children, as well as paediatric health-care centres dealing particularly with children suffering from AIDS and children of drug addicts. Replies had been given on the facilities for adults, but children's problems were special and different. With regard to the introduction of private schools, it might be asked whether they were accessible to all and whether teachers in those schools received wages comparable to those in public schools. Was apprenticeship regarded simply as a pretext for making children work and were young girls ever employed as domestic servants? Did the Guinean Government know of any cases in which Guinean children were enlisted as mercenaries by parties to conflicts in neighbouring States?

59. The report showed that Guinea had good plans, but lacked the resources to implement them. He therefore recommended that it should adopt only realistic plans, designed on the basis of resources available either in the country or internationally. It was better not to adopt plans that were not backed up by the necessary financial resources so as to avoid discouraging those responsible for executing them. He was convinced that the African continent would play a very important role in the development of civilization during the forthcoming millennium, and that was why the Committee was paying so much attention to Guinea, an African country with a great future.

60. Mrs. MOKHUANE said that she would like to know whether pregnancy prevention programmes were effective, given the high rate of teenage pregnancies and the large number of early marriages and marriages of young women whose first child was not wanted. She inquired whether surveys had been conducted to evaluate women's attitudes to contraceptives. She stressed that access to psychological care was a right of the child under the Convention. She noted that most care for children was provided in the social welfare sector rather than in the psychological field. Nothing was said about adolescents in that connection in the report under consideration. It would be useful to have further information about what adolescents in Guinea thought of themselves and their situation under the Convention. The problems of malnutrition and low birth weight influenced a child's cognitive functions. In that connection, the report showed that post-natal treatment was very inadequate. The problem of mental disorders in children could therefore not be minimal, as the Guinean delegation claimed. The report was also silent on the number of children suffering from attention disorders or slight cerebral

dysfunctions and on the psychopathology of young children in general. She therefore wished to have more information on what the Government intended to do to deal with the question of psycho-social care as a right of the child. Lastly, she inquired whether the Guinean Government had a policy for encouraging informal play activities in children aged one to three.

61. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO said that, since it had been shown that refugees were scattered across Guinean territory, she wished to know how they were registered and housed and how programmes designed for them were implemented if they were not grouped together. It was alarming to learn that government social services did not take part in the programme for refugees, 65 per cent of whom were children. Was that because cooperation with UNHCR was limited or because the Government itself was unable to take account of certain concerns, particularly sectoral concerns, involving refugee children? The situation was not clear and called for more detailed explanations.

62. With regard to the situation of children in conflict with the law, she would like to know the maximum period for which minors could be detained and whether any thought had been given to community service programmes for them. Was care taken to isolate minors from hardened criminals? It had been said that a literacy and small-craft apprenticeship centre had been established in Conakry prison. Were there plans to replicate it in other prisons? That type of approach was to be encouraged so that children in detention could continue their development and begin working life with some skills. The Guinean delegation had also said that no study had been undertaken on child domestics. She strongly encouraged the Government to carry out such a study because children had been found to be particularly vulnerable to exploitation and measures to protect them were needed. Lastly, trade in children was a serious problem in the subregion. In view of the cases that had occurred, what measures had been taken to protect children, especially under the subregional initiative that had been launched?

63. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether children were liable to corporal punishment, as seemed to be the case for adult offenders. She would like to be assured that the provisions of the Convention concerning imprisonment without trial and excessive delay in appearance before a court were being properly enforced. Were there any measures for an alternative to imprisonment for children and was any thought being given to action to prevent minors from getting into trouble with the justice system? Concerning the trade in children, were there any plans to sign bilateral agreements to monitor children crossing borders?

64. Summing up Committee members' preliminary comments on the initial report of Guinea, she said that, despite the Guinean delegation's assurances that the Convention formed part of internal law, the legislation in force should be amended and reviewed to ensure that its provisions were in conformity with those of the Convention. The Guinean Committee to Monitor Protection of the Rights of Children should receive all the support it deserved. With regard to budget allocations, while there had been some increase for education, it was uncertain whether health was on the same footing and, in that regard, the Committee drew attention to the provisions of article 4 of the Convention. Appropriate attention should also be given to the dissemination of the Convention, whether with the participation of children themselves or of civil

society in general. The general principles of the Convention should be discussed at all levels of society. In that regard, it was not known to what extent children participated in the promotion of the Convention. In the Committee's view, the fact that the age of marriage was set at 17 for girls and 18 for boys was discriminatory. The principle of the best interests of the child needed to be better understood: it was applicable not only in legal matters, but in all areas of a child's life. The fact that civil rights and fundamental freedoms were guaranteed by the Constitution did not mean that children automatically enjoyed them. Freedom of association, for instance, and freedom of opinion and religion were matters of concern in a society such as Guinea's, in which children were considered to be answerable to their parents and their families until they reached the age of 21. Where family environment and replacement protection were concerned, members took note of the Guinean delegation's replies concerning polygamy and adoption, as well as the commitment to ratify the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (1993). Guinea's position on intercountry adoption nevertheless called for more in-depth study: adoption procedures should be governed by legal mechanisms and not left to the discretion of diplomats. Under the heading of "health and welfare", there had been considerable discussion of malnutrition and its effects on children's health and development. The establishment of specific programmes and strategies to combat HIV/AIDS in children, as well as the place in society of children suffering from AIDS, had given rise to concern: HIV/AIDS was a new phenomenon and there were still many prejudices about the manner in which it was transmitted and its potential implications for the family. With regard to education, the Committee considered that teacher training and the supervision rate still left much to be desired. Greater attention also needed to be given to infrastructure, teachers' salaries, which directly affected the viability of the education system and the protection and development of children. Although it was illegal to administer corporal punishment within the school system, it might well be asked whether such punishment was not still practised as a form of discipline both in the home and at school and in other institutions, including the system of juvenile justice.

65. In any event, there was no doubt that Guinean children were in very good hands and she congratulated the Guinean delegation on the skill with which it had answered the questions asked by the members of the Committee. She appealed to it to disseminate the Convention as widely as possible on its return home.

66. Mrs. DARABA (Guinea) said that she was impressed by the interest the members of the Committee had shown in the situation of children in Guinea. Having ratified the Convention, Guinea had given itself the means of fulfilling the international commitment it had made. The State was aware that children were the country's future and that improving their situation meant improving the living conditions of the population as a whole. Her delegation had learned many lessons from its discussions with the members of the Committee. It had been struck by the frankness and sincerity of the members' questions and by their requirement that the replies should be specific. In view of the late hour, it would unfortunately be unable to satisfy their curiosity to the full, but it undertook to send the Committee the replies it

had not been able to provide at the current session, in writing, as soon as possible. On its return to Guinea, it would speak to the Head of State, the entire Government and the population on the Committee's behalf. Guinea was not only brutally short of material and financial resources, but it also needed to exchange ideas; that was why she had personally been pleased to participate in the discussion which had taken place and for which she thanked all members of the Committee.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.